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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: (C-AL7-01035) SOME COMMERCIAL FOOD
ALLOWED TO ENTER OGADEN BUT EMERGENCY FOOD RELIEF ON HOLD

Classified By: REFCOORD KENT HEALY. REASON: 1.4 (B), (D).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. On August 9, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported that World Food Program (WFP) emergency food relief is now finally en route to the Ogaden area of Ethiopia's Somali Region, with 4 trucks making deliveries, and 32 other trucks anticipated to deliver food to four of the five zones where military operations against Ogadeni insurgents continue. Additionally, limited commercial food is reportedly now available in Degehabur, following the military's escort of trucks delivering food from neighboring Somaliland.

12. (C) SUMMARY CONTINUED: In a separate meeting on August 10 with Ambassador and USAID Mission Director, the Deputy Prime Minister affirmed that the GOE sought to deliver emergency food where security conditions permitted, and welcomed the suggestion that WFP food monitors accompany such convoys. The Deputy PM expressed reservations about any USG "disaster declaration" for the Ogaden, noting the need for a careful assessment, and highlighting concerns "negative elements" could exploit such a declaration for political ends. END SUMMARY.

EMERGENCY FOOD FOR OGADEN HELD IN JIJIGA

13. (SBU) An August 9 meeting of UNOCHA, UN agencies, and NGOs provided a mixed picture of the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia's Somali Region. Information from different sources reported a tightening of the ban on commercial vehicular traffic in the last few days, which has directly affected food availability in the region. According to UNOCHA, very limited food was reaching the 5 zones where the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) is conducting an ongoing counterinsurgency against suspected supporters of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF).

-- WFP reported that humanitarian food destined for the region had been held by the military at Kebribeyah (45 km south of the regional capital, Jijiga, and just outside the area of military operations). Some 10 trucks had arrived at Kebribeyah, but only 4 had been allowed to proceed further toward the Ogaden (Warder). The ENDF was holding the other 6 trucks until the arrival of an additional 27 trucks from WFP food warehouses in Dire Dawa, so that all the trucks could

travel as a single convoy.

-- According to WFP, the emergency food distribution underway totaled 1,900 metric tons and consisted of 4 trucks for Warder, 17 trucks for Korahe, 17 for Degehabur, and 5 to Gode. WFP reiterated its concern that 1,900 metric tons of emergency food being distributed only represented a stopgap measure, and that significant tonnage was required for the Ogaden. Preliminary estimates from the WFP and the federal-level Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Agency (DPPA) indicate that 30,000 MT of commodities per month would be required to meet the food needs of the 1.5 million people in the affected zones. While WFP said that it was discussing increasing humanitarian food with the GOE, if needed, there was consensus among UN agencies and humanitarian partners that the continued ban on commercial food remains a key cause of food insecurity. (NOTE: On August 10, USAID/DCHA/OFDA's East and Central Africa office issued an internal Level 2 Alert on the food security crisis in the Somali Region; alerts range from Levels 1 to 4, with "4" being the most severe. END NOTE.)

-- New health problems had been reported in Jijiga and Fik. UNICEF was following a dual approach: addressing health needs of populations near the perimeter of zones where military operations continued, in an attempt to support populations moving out of those zones; and mobilizing mobile health, nutrition, and hygiene teams to assist the regional health bureau and increase access. WHO announced the continuation of an anti-polio campaign in early October.

¶4. (SBU) Following a visit by Abay Tsehaye, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, to Jijiga for consultations with Somali Region authorities, the Somali Region government

had reportedly re-allocated additional funds for security: increasing defense and military spending from 15 million to 55 million birr (approximately USD 6 million), and doubling the overall budget for the Somali Region from 500 million to one billion birr.

¶5. (SBU) UNOCHA Head of Office and Deputy to the Humanitarian Coordinator Paul Hebert reported that he had raised concerns about the Ogaden with foreign ministry officials on August 3, and had underscored the vulnerability of women and children. Hebert appealed for international partners to engage the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister to discuss intervention to maintain the movement of food supplies to the Somali Region.

LANDMINES POSE SAFETY CONCERNS

¶6. (SBU) According to UNOCHA, there has been little fighting in the Somali Region over the last month, but unconfirmed reports of additional landmines placed on roads. Concerns about the safety of humanitarian access has increased, following the July 29 landmine incident between the towns of Degehamedo and Degehabur (in the Fafen River valley of Degehabur Zone) that killed three local NGO staff. An increased number of landmines have reportedly been planted on main roads within the last 2 weeks, in areas where the military is active. NGOs noted that due to ongoing military operations, very few organizations are currently operating in the Ogaden; those that remain face sharp restrictions in their freedom of movement and access to communities. If the GOE permits such NGOs and other humanitarian agencies wider latitude in the near future, concern about safety (e.g., due to landmines) may continue to limit their movement and operations.

SOME FOOD FROM SOMALILAND REACHING DEGEHABUR

¶7. (SBU) In an August 10 update to A/DCM, Hebert reported

that while "severe food shortages persisted" west of Degehabur, i.e., Degehamedo Woreda, bordering Fik Zone), the situation in Degahabur woreda appeared to be "stabilizing," as the military had escorted trucks carrying commercial food from Somaliland via Kebribeyah (in Jijiga Zone) to Degahabur town. Notably, those supplying food were reportedly non-Somali and selling food at "monopolistic" prices: 25 percent above the normal price increase of basic staple foods, but an improvement over the 100-200 percent increases in June and July. In addition, trucks had managed to skirt the ban on commercial food and deliver to some rural areas in Degehabur, where prices were lower than those in town.

THREATS OF FORCED RELOCATION IN REPORTED ONLF STRONGHOLD

¶8. (SBU) In its August 9 weekly briefing, UNOCHA reported that in 2 of the 5 zones where military operations continue (Degehabur and Kebridehar Zones), the military had "requested" that elders direct pastoralists to move their livestock to four designated areas (not identified) within a week, or else they would be considered "hostiles." Elders in Kebridehar reportedly refused to force pastoralists into these designated areas. UNOCHA considers these actions as "voluntary movements," in contrast to reports of the military forcing villagers in the Warder Zone to move to selected sites.

¶9. (C) In an August 10 update to A/DCM, Hebert reported that the military was "backing off" from earlier threats of forced concentration in Degehabur, as the threats were driving pastoralists to disperse even more widely into the bush. The army had reportedly asked elders to ensure that villagers return to their original locations. Degehabur's population was reportedly one-third of its normal size, with most residents fleeing to Jijiga.

¶10. (C) Hebert noted that indiscriminate detention and killings had been observed in Degehabur (including the killings of at least 10 people in July and August, presumably by GOE security forces), and that the presence of ONLF in Degehabur Woreda was "confirmed". According to Hebert, the ONLF's strategy was to avoid major confrontations and to concentrate instead on hit-and-run attacks targeting army convoys. Major roads were reportedly safe for movement and not mined, as food was managing to come through (see below) and civilian traffic was not targeted by the ONLF.

DEPUTY PM: FOOD TO BE DELIVERED WHERE SECURITY PERMITS

¶11. (C) Ambassador, USAID Mission Direction, and A/DCM (note-taker) subsequently raised concerns about the Somali Region with Deputy Prime Minister Addisu Legesse on August 10, and noted the possibility of a USG disaster declaration, in order to facilitate the release of additional emergency food (for the Somali Region) as well as flood relief supplies (for flooding in southern Ethiopia). While pledging to discuss the matter further with GOE principals, Addisu expressed reservations about an emergency declaration, stressing the need for a careful assessment, and cautioning against "negative elements" exploiting the "political impact" of such a declaration prior to Ethiopia's Millennium celebration in early September. Addisu asserted that the weakness of the Somali Region's government exacerbated the situation there, and that half the food allocated for the region was not being used. Addisu cautioned against "a single clan monopolizing" food aid to the Somali Region, as he asserted had occurred in 2003, and noted that the ONLF was backed by insurgents from Somalia. Bilateral institutions received their information on the Somali Region from UNOCHA, he said, which he asserted exaggerated conditions in order to obtain more emergency resources.

¶12. (C) Deputy PM Addisu said that the GOE had directed that

emergency food be delivered where security conditions permitted, and that secure zones and woredas had been identified in consultations with ENDF Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Samora Yonus. Noting that security conditions dictated the ability to deliver food relief, Addisu stated that military units on the ground could best assess whether security was sufficient. While the GOE sought to assist the "truly needy," the ONLF "hijacks" food relief, he said. "They are fighting us with food (intended) for the communities." Addisu further asserted that the ONLF had infiltrated the Somali Region government, but that the GOE could not raise this publicly. Addisu agreed that having WFP food monitors accompany food convoys could be helpful. The GOE was not ignoring the problems of the Somali Region, Addisu concluded.

¶13. (C) COMMENT. As the UN and NGOs have limited access to the Ogaden, much of the information available on humanitarian and security conditions there, including on alleged human rights abuses, remains anecdotal and subject to confirmation. The resumption of commercial food deliveries to Degehabur, while limited to a single woreda, is a positive development; WFP emergency food is expected to reach additional areas within the Ogaden in the next week. END COMMENT.
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